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ABSTRACT

Close analysis of both the explicit and implicit curriculum is necessary to truly understand the kind of work relationships educators develop with their students and what values, epistemologies, and belief systems they are going to appreciate as a result of the collective educational experience. The analysis began with student voices and experiences as the researchers tried to peel away the multiple layers of their teaching and learning--several high school students were contacted and asked if they would be willing to talk about their experiences with the writing curricula in their respective schools. Focus group sessions were conducted with two different groups (n=7), and the conversations were organized around their writing experiences in and out of high school, specifically on the writing curricula. The conversations with the students are described and analyzed. First, the paper contextualizes the students' school experience and provides a review of their reactions to this highly structured, highly regulated writing environment along with their suggestions for how to improve their writing experiences. The paper then chronicles the cognitive dissonance these students are subjected to as a result of conflicting personal and institutional conceptions of writing and suggests that their experiences argue convincingly for a more postmodern, aesthetic writing curriculum. The possible consequences of not reconceptualizing the high school writing curriculum are explored. Contains 17 references. (NKA)

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The Art of the Writer: An Aesthetic Look at the Teaching of Writing .

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Paper presented at AERA, April 1999, Montreal, Canada

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"A window to reflect back upon": Introduction

In our individual and collaborative reflections on our teaching practices, we have come to understand and are working to accept that often in our stance as educators, we have failed to recognize the political, technical, scientific, ethical, and aesthetic values (Huebner, 1966) that our teaching illustrates. Through opening up our classrooms to critical observation and welcoming open dialogue with our students, we have also realized how damaging this lack of awareness can be. These conversations provide us with a more critical, reflexive stance on our own teaching without which we risk ignoring the implicit, tacit messages we communicate to our students about knowledge and learning. Unveiling our implicit messages has helped us understand Michael Apple's concept of the hidden curriculum. Apple writes: "Behind what is overtly taught in school....there is a good deal of covert 'teaching' of certain identifiable norms and values which can contribute to the internalization by students of a perspective which has little potency for raising questions" about their learning experiences (p. 174).

Exposing the fundamental flaws of our teaching is painful and at times embarrassing, but it has pushed us to work together to begin the difficult process of recognizing and deconstructing the hidden curriculum and understanding the influence it has on students' attitudes and opinions. Students have shown us that while they may quickly forget the information and skills taught in the classroom, "dispositional elements" (p. 175), those values wrapped within our explicit teaching, will remain with them for years to come. Consequently, if students are tacitly taught negative or destructive "value orientations" (p. 175), those orientations have the potential to permanently influence their perspectives. Apple argues convincingly for this point:

> For we cannot expect students to develop dispositions and propensities such as intellectual openmindedness, acceptance of pluralistic values, and others, if the school environment does not actively support them. More to the point is the fact that we cannot assume that students will develop attitudes which reflect a positive stance on the need for creatively reconstructing outmoded instructions, norms of activity, and modes of perception when these attributes are given a negative treatment in schools today (p. 176).

We agree with Apple's perspective, and contend that close analysis of both the explicit and implicit curriculum is necessary in order to truly understand the kind of work relationships we develop with our students and what values, epistemologies, and belief systems we and our students are going to appreciate as a result of our collective educational experience. This analysis is meaningful only if we work with and for the very people who are most affected by our curriculum: the students. Recognizing the extent to which conversations with students have informed our practice, and acknowledging students as powerful resources for explicating and designing curricula, we felt it was essential to begin with their voices and experiences as we tried to peel away the multiple layers of our teaching and learning.

Unfortunately, at the time we began this project neither of us were currently employed as classroom teachers. If we had been, ideally we would have invited our students to join us in an extended investigation into the curriculum being co-constructed through our work together. Instead, we used the students' stories of their experiences in the writing classroom as a window to reflect back upon our own practice. We contacted several high school students we had worked with or taught in the past few years, asking them if they would be willing to talk with us about their experiences with the writing curricula in their respective high schools. We conducted focus sessions with two groups of high school students. The first group consisted of one female (Toni) and two males (Luke and Marcus) from City High, a large, urban school. The second group consisted of two females (Gita and Virginia) and two males (Saleem and Karl) who attend Central, a private, suburban high school. We chose to work with two distinct groups of students in the hopes of covering a broad, cross-cultural range of experiences and perspectives.

Our conversations with both groups of students were organized around their writing experiences in and out of school. We were interested in what they find satisfying and dissatisfying about those experiences, and how they would like to reconceptualize the way they write and/or how they are taught writing. We chose to focus on writing curricula for several reasons. First, this focus correlated with our personal interests in rhetoric and composition. We both identify ourselves as English educators and share a commitment to oral and written

literacies. Second, the integrity and utility of secondary writing curricula in American high schools has repeatedly come under attack in the past few decades. Developmental writing programs are becoming the norm in higher education in an effort to provide incoming students with the writing skills they should have received in high school. Every year, millions of dollars are funneled into new and improved writing programs and materials across the country, yet educators and employers are still decrying students' immature, unsophisticated writing styles. Something is not working.

Through the process of researching and writing this paper with our students we have stumbled upon what we think is a rather interesting alternative to the ways in which we have traditionally taught writing. What follows is a detailed description and analysis of our conversations with these seven high school students. We will first contextualize their school experience. Then, we will provide a review of their reactions to this highly structured, highly regulated writing environment and their suggestions for how to improve their writing experiences. Next, we will chronicle the cognitive dissonance these students are subjected to as a result of conflicting personal and institutional conceptions of writing and suggest that their experiences argue convincingly for a more post-modern, aesthetic writing curriculum. Finally, we will explore the possible consequences of *not* reconceptualizing the high school writing curriculum.

"I haven't had a single creative writing piece all year": Contextualizing Experience

Throughout the two conversations, we were struck by the modernist picture that the students painted of their schools. We use the term modernism because the students' educational experience arises out of a belief in the ordered construction of quantifiable knowledge. William Doll (1993) explains that a modernist conceptualization of curriculum "allow[s] only one type of knowing: a rational, definitional knowing" (p. 33). He continues, "In a modernist framework, there is a 'natural order' or 'best way' on which all methodology is based. Once discovered, this best way should be, indeed must be, followed" (p. 45). Cleo Cherryholmes (1994) would argue

that this epistemology is rooted in logical positivism which believes that "we can speak correctly about the world" (p. 4). While we believe the students' academic experiences reflect this version of reality, we are aware of the limitations and overuse of the modernist label. Even so, the tenacious presence of modernism's central tenets in our classrooms demands attention in order to make it possible for other ways of knowing and learning to be equally valued and practiced.

Even though the two groups' schools are markedly different in locations and socioeconomic backgrounds, what the students experience in the classroom, in some fundamental ways, is remarkably similar. For example, the schools are divided by grades. The students go through their school day moving from one discipline to another. These disciplines are divided into time frames. In both schools, the teacher represents each discipline and disseminates information in varying ways to the students. For example, Gita commented on how her teacher presents essay assignments: "We're always given a piece of paper with a list of possible thesises." Rayna described her English teacher's method: "She gives us a book every other month and after the book she shows us the movie. Before the book, she gives us two or three worksheets on vocabulary in the book, words you might not know." All of the students are assigned reading from a list of books that have been deemed important by the teacher. Saleem said, "Well, in Lit AP, you're supposed to teach a certain amount of books that are assigned." They read these books as a class and discuss them.

Gita mentioned that teachers generate essay assignments from the books. The teachers grade these pieces of writing and return them to the students. During the conversation, Marcus shared a piece of his writing and guided us through his teacher's comments: "Here is my research paper that is supposed to be worth two test grades. Some of it is underlined and it says that it is 'fluff' (referring to teacher's comments). I don't even know what she means by fluff. We had a month to write a couple of pages down...My grade was low on that because of my spelling mistakes." Both schools focus on analytical writing. The students are taught that effective analytical writing is comprised of different sections: the introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Karl's experience in the classroom echoes the other students with

whom we spoke: "I haven't had a single creative writing piece all year, in class, or out. We haven't done anything creative. We read the book , discuss it in class, and maybe write on that at the end."

Contemporary education, public and private, still clings to the Ralph Tyler (1949) rationale, a pedagogy steeped in modernist epistemology and methodology. Tyler proposes four basic principles of curriculum and instruction:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? (pp. 1-2)

The overall goal of curriculum in the Tyler rational is to effect behavior and a teacher does this by designing an objective oriented curriculum. Joseph Schwab (1969) writes, "Given this view, the aim of curriculum (is) to discriminate the right ideas (by the way of analysis of extant bodies of knowledge), determine the order in which they could be learned by children as they developed, and thereafter present these ideas at the right time with clarity, associations, organization, and application" (p. 7).

Many teachers have determined that the most effective and efficient means of teaching writing is through the five paragraph essay form. This writing structure provides a tidy format for the essential elements of writing. It also provides an "intended, directed, and controlled outcome - one that can be measured" (Doll, 1993, p.53). Once the students write their five paragraph essays, often choosing theses created by the teacher, the teacher can easily grade them because there is an identifiable structure. Therefore, a teacher can recognize whether a student understands the essay form.

In addition, a modernist pedagogy supports the ideology that there is a single truth. Marcus believes that in order to receive a good grade he "has to agree with (the teacher)" in his writing. The fact that the teacher has the definitive say on the students' work - the grade - exemplifies this point. The students with whom we spoke experience learning environments which are highly structured and organized by the teacher. There is an expectation that students

will take the assignments created by the teachers and complete them to the teachers' satisfaction. Most of the students are dissatisfied with their current writing experience and voice what they think should be done differently in order to make writing in school more rewarding and fulfilling. We will discuss their dissatisfaction and suggestions for improvement later in this paper.

"I had one daring little six paragraph essay": Reactions Writing Environment

One prevailing characteristic of a modernist writing pedagogy is that the writing process usually begins with the teacher. Students consistently receive their direction and motivation to write from sources outside of themselves. Teachers assign writing on a particular topic, in response to a specified reading, due on a pre-determined date. If this process begins with a specific assignment, the writer is expected to construct a discourse with little indication of what purpose his/her writing serves. More often, the writer is given a generic topic upon which he/she is asked to expound. In this case, the conception of a developed subject depends entirely upon the inspired writer's creative outlook.

As several of the students pointed out, this external source of motivation is often problematic. For example, Gita admitted that this year she has had difficulty getting motivated about and feeling connected with her writing. She explained that "it's hard to find things to write about when the stuff in the class [isn't] motivating you. Cuz that would definitely feed my ideas." Karl agreed, adding, "Like, if you're not motivated, there's probably a reason why. It's not just like, 'Oh, this year I'm not going to be motivated'."

The above comments illustrate the degree to which students in a modernist paradigm have come to depend upon external sources of motivation. Although they acknowledge that motivation should be a mixture of internal and external factors, they tend to attribute their apparent "lack" of motivation to factors or conditions in their surrounding environment. Karl recognized the repercussions of relying too heavily on external motivation when discussing why some students choose not to take Advanced Placement courses. He wondered,

> But are they naturally that way, or were they pushed towards that because they've always been motivated. I mean, if you started out not motivating them that much and then giving a lot of choice to them would they then be much more motivated when they were left completely on their own?

Karl questions whether dependence on external motivation actually cripples students in some sense. If they are given less external motivation, would they then learn to depend upon themselves and their inner resources to a greater extent? Virginia's experience seems to support this hypothesis. Her seventh grade English teacher chose to eliminate one of the most influential motivating factors for students - grades. Without the pressure of writing for a grade, Virginia felt that her writing was more for herself, and she was consequently more motivated and engaged in her work: "It was basically writing for yourself....And...you could tell that *mostly* people were motivated without the structure" [emphasis hers].

Conversely, to Marcus, the grade is important - "Everyone wants a grade" - but only when it affirms intellectual achievement. Unfortunately, he feels that the grades he receives are "pointless" because, in his experience, they essentially only reflect the students' ability to get something down on paper within a short amount of time. In general, the City High students bemoaned the simplicity and pettiness of many of their writing assignments. They told us that although their teachers often ask them to write responses to various readings, they only expect a sentence or two; they do not require students to write fully developed, tightly constructed essays. Marcus explained, "They [referring to the writing assignments] are pretty incomplete. They [referring to the students] aren't expressing their complete thoughts." He feels this is just "busy work...because we get nothing out of it." Luke echoed this sentiment saying that the type of writing he does in class is "something to make the administration think that we're busy." The apparent futility of these assignments undermines what value there may be in grading student writing. Marcus made the argument, "You can't really grade because those papers are just thoughts. Many of them are incomplete....the papers are just brainstorming sentences." Luke pinpointed the ramifications of this: "Why work hard when you can just do this and get it over with. I can get an A for something that I just throw together."

In spite of this bleak outlook, Luke believes that the complexity of their writing could be improved, thereby becoming more meaningful, if students followed a personal and meaningful writing process. He suggested that,

> I think if you went through all of those steps [referring to the writing process], I think that the final copy would be better than something that you would write that same day. It doesn't really give you time to think out your thoughts and place things where you want them to be placed or where you think they need to be placed. It's not really organized. After doing all of those steps it would be better organized.

Karl reiterated this feeling of school writing being incomplete, or insubstantial when he described it as "way too short term." According to Karl, not only are students not exploring more complex ideas and forms in their writing, but they are only writing to please this year's teacher, or to prepare for next year's standards. Teachers do not discuss students' writing as having long term or long lasting influence but instead focus on getting them ready for the next scholastic requirement. This recursive process is not only artificial, but is antithetical to the way writers work.

Central students also complained of stale, limp academic writing, but they attributed the cause to education's excruciating emphasis on one of the most salient representations of the modernist paradigm - the traditional five-paragraph essay. Generations of students have memorized the introduction-three body paragraphs-conclusion format and have diligently, if not always enthusiastically, poured their words, thoughts, and ideas into this structure. Gita summarized this process: "five paragraph essay is just like 'put the ingredients in and stick it in the oven'."

The students we spoke with revealed a deep sense of frustration and resentment toward the five-paragraph essay. Gita exclaimed that "it has nothing to do with anything....it's a thing to teach you structure but...it's not used at all." She added, "It's completely disregarded in anything important that you write, a lot of times....like in the big papers that we write, we completely disregard the five paragraphs." Virginia summarized her disappointment by sarcastically admitting, "I had one, daring little six paragraph essay." She continued by relaying a rather ironic

story from an analytical writing course she took one summer: "We read essays, and we wrote essays, but the essays we read were famous essays and of course they weren't five paragraphs. And I asked the teacher about it (why the students write five paragraph essays) and she just said, 'you have to write five paragraph essays'."

Much of the students' resentment appears to be rooted in negative experiences with this writing structure. Several students related emotional experiences they have had when the content of their work was sacrificed or undervalued in favor of their paper's structure. For example, Karl shared an experience he had with a four-paragraph essay he wrote. As he explained,

> ...it was four paragraphs, but he [his teacher] said it was an excellent idea so he gave me a "C" because it didn't fit the criteria of five paragraphs. But it was a great idea, and if it was just solely based on the idea he would have given me like an "A" but because it didn't meet the form it wasn't worthy.

Karl's reaction to his teacher's feedback was that,

> it made it seem like form is much more important than what you're actually writing and I don't think....like you can give a perfectly formed paper as a thesis for college or something, talking about how you like blueberries and if it's perfectly formed it doesn't mean anything. It's like what you say [isn't important].

Karl is obviously making an overly simplistic comment about the relationship between form and content in academic writing. We acknowledge that the two are interrelated and coexist to a greater degree than Karl portrays, but what is significant about his comment is that he *believes* that the argument is as simple as form vs. content. Based upon his experience, he has come to the conclusion that what he writes is not as valuable as how he organizes it.

Unfortunately, Karl's opinion of what is important and valuable does not correspond with academia's opinion. As exemplified by these students' comments and experiences, a modernist writing pedagogy emphasizes form and structure over content. Students are given explicit instructions on how their paper should look, how many pages they should have, how many paragraphs are acceptable, etc. Charles Yarnoff (1980) quotes Frank D'Angelo, "In generating

discourse, the individual uses this underlying abstract structure as a base. Then he supports this structure by filling in details from the universe of discourse around him" (p. 556). But the process of developing and organizing ideas into rhetorically coherent, convincing pieces, is sorely neglected. Teachers unintentionally instruct young writers,

> that ideas need not be verified through an examination of assumptions, material conditions, or experience. Whatever the student writes...is okay as long as...he or she organizes it...the message to the student is that their writing has little relation to the world (Yarnoff, p. 558).

Many students contrasted the constricting five-paragraph essay with more creative or personal writing. Unfortunately, because teachers assign so little creative writing in their course work, students are forced to question its real value and utility. Repeated emphasis and assignment of analytic writing, with only an occasional creative writing assignment, sends an explicit message which type of writing is more valuable. Gita illustrated the extent to which she recognizes this apparent writing hierarchy: "I think there's a notion that you can't get as much out of a book, or you can't get as much out of an essay or a piece if it [a piece of writing] is creative. There's some sort of notion people have that it's not going to be as thought provoking." Virginia vocalized a similar perspective, stating that "creative writing is kind of thought of as less structured, and I think its sometimes thought of as less sophisticated."

What is important to note is that although many of the students we spoke with recognize that these are the messages they receive, they do not underestimate the value of more creative, personalized writing. Saleem made the following argument:

> I don't see why it has to be less structured. I think part of the problem with assigned creative writing pieces is that people think they're less structured and so don't spend as much time as they might to formulate an essay that has certain structure. [But] I think you can really pay attention to the structures that people do use when they write short stories, and spend as much time on it as you would on an essay.

Although Saleem begins his statement arguing for creative writing's inherent structure and sophistication, he ends with the admission that very often when he doesn't have to "follow the

rules" his writing is less coherent, and less logically organized: "There is no clear progression like there would be in a five paragraph essay."

Students believe that this "clear progression" contributes to another distinction between analytic and creative writing - the way they are graded. Several students described experiences when teachers did not grade their creative writing because, as Gita explained, they "didn't feel right" about grading students' creative work. Saleem argued:

> It requires less work for the teacher to analyze a five paragraph essay because if the assignment is staying the same for everyone, then you can compare them all to each other and say, "Okay, now I know who got the most out of this book, who's really been thinking about this, and who's just been reading the Cliff Notes." But if you assign a creative piece, some people may have had excellent ideas and don't know quite how to execute them...and then some other students may just have written something very silly. Sometimes it can be difficult to distinguish.

Although educators may genuinely be respecting their students ideas when they refrain from grading creative or personal writing, in a world where grades are the unrepudiated currency, *not* assigning grades transmits the message that more personal thinking and writing is not valuable.

Karl made a poignant insight during this discussion, speculating why creative writing is or is not a valued means of expression in the writing classroom. He feels that creative writing is not assigned because,

> for a teacher to allow creative writing assignments, they have to let go a little cuz if you're controlling the creative writing, its not really creative. And you can't really be inspired if they're controlling what you say....So I think they [teachers] are afraid to give up the control of the class.

Karl critiques the realities of the modernist classroom, where power and control are located within the teacher, who attempts to transmit a required body of quantifiable, systematically constructed knowledge. In this reality, where order and symmetry reign supreme, Karl recognizes that there is little room for more chaotic, aesthetic writing experiences.

Unfortunately, both Karl and many educators wrongly conceptualize stability and chaos as contradictory experiences. As Doll (1993) explains, the two are actually more similar than we

may imagine: "not only does chaos perform its magic within bounds or limits, but that deep within chaos itself there is a universal structure" (p. 93). In fact, "creativity occurs by the interaction of chaos and order, between unfettered imagination and disciplined skill" (p. 88). Dwayne Huebner (1966) also talks about the importance of chaos and its essential role in an aesthetic rationality of education. He calls for teachers to embrace the unknown associated with knowledge and discuss it openly with students. He argues that "in teaching, educational activity must order, but the unbridled chaos should not be hidden from the student. To do so is to deprive him of the element which calls forth the mute response, the 'sustained attention' and the 'perpetual desire'" (p. 16).

"My paper is just so much better...It's always more interesting to come up with my own thesis": Student Suggestions

Much of our discussion with both groups of students focused on the type of writing they do in school. As discussed above, most students feel that these traditional assignments were either unstimulating or too stifling. For example, Luke complained that "some topics, I don't have a lot to write about them. One time she [his teacher] asked how do we feel about single sex schools. That is not really an interesting topic at all." Luke's reaction to this assignment is understandable when one considers the fact that he currently attends a co-educational high school; the issue of single sex schools is not particularly relevant to his current reality. He added later that even though he had difficulty relating to this topic, he may have been able to come up with something to say if he had been given more time to complete the assignment. Luke noted that the concept of time powerfully influences the writing process.

Marcus also has difficulty with assignments to which he can not relate:

> Sometimes she wants you to expand on someone else's thought, which is pretty hard because we didn't live in that time period. A lot of people don't even know what was going on during that time period...She gave us this sheet that had seven quotes on it, and we were to pick a quote and we had to expand on it...I wrote on something that Darwin wrote, something about a man not feeling equal...I didn't know if he was talking about slavery or man and evolution so I was confused, and I tried to write from both angles.

> She told me that I was wasting the whole period writing because I wasn't standing behind any specific opinion.

Marcus was troubled by this assignment because he felt he did not have the necessary background knowledge or context to respond correctly. In addition, he told us he could not relate to any of the quotes the teacher provided which made it difficult to expand upon them and develop his own ideas.

When asked what the students would suggest as alternative assignments, ones which would be more personally meaningful and challenging, they gave us some rich, insightful suggestions. For example, the City High students shared some specific, academic writing experiences they felt were more engaging and successful. Rayna talked about a time when she rewrote the ending to a Shakespeare play and then performed her work for her classmates. Luke also had a positive experience writing plays and was actually chosen as one of ten playwrights to present his work at a local theater. Finally, Marcus recalled a teacher who attempted to make the literature they were reading more relevant and significant to contemporary society. He described how that teacher made Wuthering Heights applicable to the 20th century, and then had the students write their own pieces, exploring what would happen with that story if it took place in present day.

In order to create more meaningful writing experiences, several students argued for the necessity of adapting an assigned topic or form to meet their personal interests. For example, Gita explained that her teachers usually distribute a list of potential topics with every paper assignment. Although they are not thesis statements, she admitted that it would take very little rewording in order to turn them into such a statement. These lists are intended to spark students' thinking, but Gita finds: "My paper is just so much better....it's always more interesting to come up with my own thesis." Karl agreed, claiming that his most satisfying writing experience came when he adapted the prescribed assignment, specifically the form, to meet his own personal needs:

> I think one of the most rewarding experiences this year was when I went away from the form. Well, I didn't go away from the form but I took the assignment and just sort of

> catered it to what I was wanting to write about instead of looking at his assignment and writing like, sort of whatever he wanted. It just seems like when you actually cater it to your needs and what you really want to write about, it's much more fulfilling to you.

Although he does not suggest restructuring or adapting writing assignments, Luke related an experience when he attempted to write from a more personal perspective:

> She [his teacher] will have a question and we will have to write an essay on answering that question, and we won't write the answer to that question, we will write our opinions on that question, and that's not what she asked for. One time I overlooked the questions and wrote my opinion on the phrase, and she asked me to really answer it...She doesn't want your opinions.

By not allowing or encouraging students to incorporate their personal perspective, voice, and experience in their writing, educators fail to take into account the concept that knowledge is socially constructed. As John Dewey (1929) argued, humans construct knowledge by identifying and attempting to solve perceived problems. According to this conceptualization, knowledge is a very personalized, experiential construct. Failing to acknowledge this reality, and consequently placing undo emphasis on the subject-matter of learning, results in what Dewey refers to as the "three evils." Namely, there is "a) a lack of organic connection between the child's experience and the material, b) a lack of motivation on the part of the student to learn, and c) a lack of opportunity to abstract and generalize information which inhibits a child's ability to reason" (p. 22).

Writing should not only solicit students' personal reactions or perspectives; such an approach would be as limiting and crippling as a purely analytic approach. Writing teachers should acknowledge the power of their students' personal voices, as well as their more critical, less subjective perspectives. It is the integration of these two sides of a person's voice that makes his/her writing artfully constructed. One means of possibly recognizing the power and value of both the personal and the analytical (and in so doing, avoid Dewey's three evils) is to create an environment where students have choice and control of their own writing and learning. Dewey (1934) writes, "The moments when the creature is both most alive and most composed

and concentrated are those of fullest intercourse with the environment in which sensuous material and relations are most completely merged" (p. 103).

The students value this integration. Karl, in particular, was emphatic on this point, arguing that "the teacher needs to learn how to lose control of the class. I think losing control of the class is probably the best thing that they can do for the class." Inherent in a teacher-centered learning environment, is the teacher's ability to impose power over the curriculum and control over the students. By deliberately relinquishing control, teachers are then able to distribute that power more equally among their students. The onus of deciding what and how to write shifts from being the teacher's responsibility to the shared responsibility of those participating in the classroom. When students make decisions about their learning, they are more invested in the experience and better able to "psychologize" knowledge (Dewey, 1929). Karl expressed this opinion eloquently when he said,

> I think they [teachers] should teach you the information and then let you go on your own. Because I know the majority of people aren't writing poetry or anything on their own, but when it's made available to them they'll get into it and they'll write as much as they can of it. I think it [knowledge] should all be opened up to [the students], in a certain amount of time, and then you're opened up to do whatever you want.

"Stuff I write in school is more of a necessity, more of what I have to do. So when I write outside of school it is something that I want to do": Cognitive Dissonance

As many of these reactions indicate, functioning in a modernist academic paradigm causes a great deal of cognitive dissonance for students: the mechanistic, ordered reality of their scholastic experience often conflicts with students' personal reality. The students exemplify this conflict by recognizing the conspicuous differences between these two realities and adopting strategies to bridge those differences.

Gita shared with us that when she writes for school, "I have a certain point in mind that I have to get to eventually." She added that even though she may get to that point, she often feels she could have done so in a more convincing manner. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, she is not encouraged to continually revisit and revise her work. The pressure of meeting a due date

overrides the opportunity to process writing over an extended period of time, thus communicating the message that successful writing conforms to a specific schedule.

Gita compared this experience to writing she does for herself. As she explained, "With my personal stuff, I don't feel like it has to stay along some lines, and that I can change completely because I can always go back and write..." In our conversation, Gita expressed a preference for writing situations that allow her to revisit and reconstruct her writing as necessary. She is able to take as much time as needed in order to make her writing meaningful.

Karl's conversation also revealed his struggle negotiating between school and self, specifically in terms of dealing with an imposed time schedule. Karl described his school writing experience as both constrictive and unchallenging. Academic writing is constrictive for Karl because he disagrees with having to be inspired on cue. He admitted having difficulty sitting down and thinking, "Gotta write something interesting, gotta write something interesting." Unfortunately, the structure and presentation of scholastic writing demands students do just that. Karl argues that inspiration takes patience and time: "It's like you'll be walking around and you'll have a great idea for a story, or something, or a great idea for an ending, or you come up with an intro or a character or something...you can't be inspired by a certain time."

In an attempt to circumvent this conflict, Karl often resorts to writing about the same topic, in different variations: "When I am assigned something, because I 'm lazy, I have an easy way out. I can always write about Communism for any paper, any assignment he gives me." Although this technique works, and he gets satisfactory results, Karl criticizes academic writing for allowing him to be "lazy." When he writes for himself, he has higher standards: "With my actual writing I can't just sit down and rant. Well, I can, but I don't feel I've gained anything from sitting down and ranting for awhile."

Another discrepancy identified by several students was that school writing is for someone else, whereas personal, or what Marcus refers to as "artistic" writing, is for yourself. Luke shared that his most satisfying writing experience is when he writes for himself. He told us,

> Sometimes I get filled with thoughts, thoughts that you don't really want to express with other people because people might not be into it like you are. Really really deep thoughts that you can't even talk to people about because they might say "oh, you crazy" or whatever. So you write it down because that is the only way that you will get it out.

He contrasted this type of writing to writing he does in school: "Stuff I write in school is more of a necessity, more of what I have to do. So when I write outside of school it is something that I want to do."

We would argue that Luke has developed this predilection for private, self-satisfying writing as a defensive response to the meaningless, hollow writing teachers require him to do in school. Unfortunately, exclusively valuing writing which facilitates this type of experience may actually put Luke at a disadvantage. Although self-expressive writing may be personally rewarding and meaningful, this genre does not encourage writing as a communicative act. Luke may be able to explore and nourish his psyche, but he is not learning how to use his voice to interact with an audience. He is not using his writing as a conduit for sharing his perspective with society, thereby contributing to the dialogue between individuals and society. In addition, he is not receiving constructive feedback on his work, which in turn would enable him to improve his writing ability. As a student who is planning on attending college, Luke's lack of experience with, and lack of interest in more analytic, socially oriented writing may hinder his future academic performance.

Although Marcus has had a similar educational experience to Luke, Marcus recognizes and values the social reconstructive power of writing. He believes that "your writing can be used as a catalyst to do stuff." The writing Marcus currently does in school does not suit this purpose - he was very critical of the simplicity and futility of many of his school writing assignments - which raises the questions: Where did he learn about this powerful application of writing? How did he come to believe in the use of writing to institute change? And where will he be able to learn the skills and techniques necessary to use writing for this purpose? A possible answer lies in how he describes his writing process: "When I first start writing something, I usually try to imitate the style of writers that I like or are interested in." Marcus identifies the power and

guidance within published writers of the present and past. Essentially, with little help from his teachers, Marcus has become a connoisseur (Eisner, 1976) of writing.

Finally, our discussion revealed a serious dissonance between what/how students are expected to write and how they are interacting with texts and authors. Virginia would like the opportunity to study specific models of writing in what she reads for her course work, working from the premise that "you learn to write from reading." As she explained, "...there aren't any examples of five paragraph essays. And that's my main problem, I think, because I learn the most by reading...I, start writing in the style I'm reading." Virginia recognizes the allure of "empathically participat[ing] in the life of another" (Eisner, 1976, p. 13).

Unfortunately, these students do not feel that teachers encourage them to make these connections between what they are reading and how they are writing in school. Although students may study the social, political, and historical context of what they read, they rarely, if ever, study how those authors constructed their texts. They do not explore why the author chose the format he/she did and what struggles and challenges he/she faced during the writing process. Solely focusing on the written product ignores the composing process, thereby disregarding it as a distant, elusive mystery rather than a tangible art form. Gita explicated the irony of this experience: "Just the way that we're trying to learn how to write, but we're not examining the way the writers are writing....How can you learn to write if you don't examine the way the writers are writing their own pieces?"

Richard Young (1982) refers to these conceptualizations of writing and writing pedagogy as Art1 and Art2. Art1 theories of rhetoric regard writing as something mysterious which subsequently cannot be taught. Because each individual is unique, experiences the world from his/her personal perspective, and communicates those experiences in his/her own original manner, there can be no such thing as a systematic approach to writing. Each person is responsible for creating his/her own distinctive approach. This belief is evident in much of the terminology used by Art1 rhetorics. For example, the ability to write is referred to as a "gift," an "exceptional power," or an "inspiration." These expressions all denote an elusive, undefined

skill. They imply that some people are naturally endowed and write with grace and aplomb, whereas others who are not so blessed are less skilled practitioners. This terminology has created a persistent ideology that the ability to write successfully cannot be taught; you either "have it" or you don't. Consequently, Art1 pedagogies focus on "teachable" skills such as grammar, organization (e.g. the five-paragraph essay), and style.

In Art2 theories of rhetoric, a writer is encouraged to analyze the composing process, identify the individual parts that make up the whole, and employ heuristic procedures which will help him/her execute that process him or herself. This analysis, combined with training, education, and practice, gives writers the chance to become expert rhetoricians. The more a writer studies rhetorical strategies, imitates expert performers, and produces discourse, the more skilled he/she will be at the composing process. Writing is therefore transformed from a thing of mystery and illusion to a systematic, reproducible activity. As Aristotle remarked, "[Both those who have a knack and those who have an art can carry out the activity, but we view artists]...as being wiser not in virtue of being able to act, but of having theory for themselves and knowing the causes." In this regard, art is equated with competence, and competence is something which can be taught.

The current modernist pedagogy conceptualizes writing from an Art1 perspective. Teachers teach writing as a set of habits, but do not expose students to the principles of success that lie behind those habits. Essentially, teachers expect students to become proficient writers yet do not engage the students in a discourse on the craft and art of writing. In order to truly understand and appreciate writing as an art, students needs to explore the practices of skillful practitioners. They need to carefully examine the way experts write in order to discern recurrent patterns and behaviors that produce successful writing. Once those patterns and behaviors have been identified and deconstructed, students can assemble a toolbox of proven rhetorical strategies which they can draw upon as they create their own discourse.

"Yeah, actually, it surprised me that in class we never talk about...the literary context from which the writing is coming": Aesthetics and Postmodernism

It is Marcus' self-directed connoisseurship, Gita's frustration at the lack of integration of art and writing, and all of the students' desire for more creativity that have led us to argue for an aesthetic, post-modern orientation in the teaching of writing. Within the students' frustrations and desires lies the question: Why do many English teachers not engage their students in a discourse on the aesthetics of writing? Through our own experience in the classroom and conversations with these students, we have come to see that a modernist, writing curriculum falls short of its goals of "creating" proficient writers. By following Dewey and Cherryholmes' advice of "(enhancing) the aesthetics that are integral to every complete experience" (Cherryholmes, 1994, p. 13), we believe that students will become more adept and artful writers. Our task as writing teachers, in Dewey's (1934) words, "is to restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience" (p. 3). Moving one step further, we would like to not only connect the process with the product, we also strongly believe that the power for understanding writing lies in the actual *doing* of the art, not in the exclusive observation of it.

Too often in English classrooms, teachers expect students to critique the writing they read with little to no understanding of the craft, the historical context, or the personal nature of that writing. Essentially, students must write about an art of which they have no experience. Saleem says, "Yeah, actually, it surprised me that in class we never talk about, not just the historical context, but the literary context from which the writing is coming." Richard Bernstein (1983) exposes the irony in this practice: "We are to disregard everything in which a work of art is rooted, such as its original context and its secular or religious function, in order for the 'pure work of art' to stand out" (p. 119).

Aesthetics seeks to integrate art with experience and practice. Dewey (1934) writes, "The purpose of esthetic art being the enhancement of direct experience itself, it uses the medium fit

for the accomplishment of that end. The necessary equipment of [the student] is, first to have the experience, and then to elicit constituents in terms of the medium used" (p. 320). This kind of integration relies on previous artistic experiences from which the students can draw: "In order for a work to be expressive to a percipient is meanings and values extracted from prior experience and funded in such a way that they fuse with the qualities directly presented in the work of art" (Dewey, 1934, p. 98). One of our goals as writing educators is to help our students craft powerful pieces, writing that affects people. Living the life of the writer will enable students to construct connections between their lives and the art that they read. As Bernstein (1983) succinctly states, "the work of art is fully realized only when it is performed" (p. 125). This aesthetic approach will also help deconstruct the myth that writers and their writing are objects read only to be understood, not psychologized.

The danger in not adopting a more aesthetic stance in the teaching of writing is more precarious than one may think. We have already shown how the modernist stance separates the student from the art, but what exactly does that separation perpetuate? It labels published writing as an other, not within the world of the student. This positioning implies that the student is not a writer or that he or she does not have the potential to be a Shakespeare, Cisneros or Melville. This, in turn, is supported by the fact that students rarely write "creative" pieces - writing that resembles the genre they are studying- and when they do write creatively it is often not graded. Virginia, Gita, Rayna and Luke have shown us, grades in a process-goal oriented classroom legitimate work, no matter how petty. By not grading creative writing, the teacher further marginalizes the act and the art and dislocates the art and craft of writing from the books that students read.

How writers write is complex and convoluted. Every writer has his/her own way of getting to what it is that he/she wants to say. For example, Sherman Alexie has a large Uhaul box where he keeps all of his ideas. Thousands of scraps of paper with thoughts scribbled on them fill this box. When he is at a loss for a writing idea, he plunges his arm into this box and fishes for one (Junker, 1995, p. 21). We mention the mystery and complexity of the product of

art and the act of doing it because both are integral to our students fully understanding who they are as writers. In the classrooms in which the students we spoke with sit, how our revered writers write will always be a mystery because the aesthetics of writing is rarely discussed. This kind of ignorance on the part of teachers and subsequently students will perpetuate the myth that words are divinely ordained in the writer's heads or that books are, in Wilfrid Sellar's words, a "myth of the given" (Bernstein, 1991, p. 327). In other words, published writing is given intellectual status irrespective of the critical discourse that surrounds it.

Granted, modernist teaching attempts to come to grips with how writing is constructed and strives to make meaning out of texts, but the methods which are used often include imposed structures and meanings. Consequently, the mystery is never demystified, instead, it is described away. Huebner (1966) writes, "...the curricular worker seems unwilling to deal with mystery or doubt or unknowables. Mysteries are reduced to problems, doubts to error, and unknowables to yet-to-be-discoverables" (p. 3). As Huebner explains, aesthetics embraces these fears and makes them a part of the process of knowing. There is no one way of knowing as is there is no one way of writing. This mode of being speaks to Karl's, Gita's and Marcus' deep understanding of their own processes of writing. We are reminded of Karl's need to walk around and let ideas hit him or Marcus' need to hand his writing out to people and use this feedback in further organizing his thoughts in writing. Gita likes the fact that her creative writing "can change completely because I can always go back and write about what my first draft was about for something else." These students prove that satisfying results in writing do not often evolve out of artificial time constraints or contrived assignments. Huebner (1966) calls on us to find ways of recognizing the individual nature of writing, to legitimate the idiosyncrasies that our students as real writers will have. These writing mannerisms are not deemed important in many classrooms only because other ways of knowing are not allowed to enter the classroom discourse.

Post-modernism opens the discourse. Implicit within post-modernism is the understanding that there is no one universal truth, that knowledge is not individually constructed. Rather, it is socially constructed. If there is no universal truth, no "myth of the given," then the

teacher removes him or herself from the center of the experience. The teacher does what Karl would like him/her to do, lose control. By losing control, Karl does not mean anarchy. Instead, he is arguing for the need to hear multiple voices, multiple truths within the writing classroom. In order for real writing to happen, the students must be able to write what they feel and then share that with the community, getting various responses in return. Rather than the audience being the teacher's singular opinion, the post-modern, aesthetic classroom has an audience of however many are in the class. Each and every voice in the room is a legitimate critical voice. Huebner (1966) writes, "The intent throughout classroom activity is not a search for preconceived ends but a search for beauty, for integrity and form and the peace which accompanies them, and for truth as life is unveiled through the acting and speaking of the participants" (p. 14). Quoting Paul Valery, he continues by describing the benefit of this experience:

> 'The students...can be moved, then, 'to the enchanted forest of language...with the express purpose of getting lost; far gone in bewilderment, they seek crossroads of meaning, unexpected echoes, strange encounters; they fear neither detours, surprises, nor darkness...So the student seeks to dominate his new found chaos by his own intelligence, and as a critic the teacher responds with critical concern but sympathetic intent.' (p. 15).

While Huebner attributes this transformative movement to the teacher's art, we would rather ascribe moments like these to the art of the students within a post-modern, aesthetic classroom.

Using aesthetics in the teaching of writing is not a veiled form of relativism where anything goes and there is no form of objective integrity for the writing that is produced. We are arguing for using different sources for identifying integrity. We believe that students have the ability to determine what is powerful, effective writing. An aesthetic orientation would use the texts that students read and write as models for coming to a group understanding of effective writing. Often the published texts that students read and their own writing will conflict aesthetically. This friction will help lead students to a better understanding of the meaning

behind published texts. More importantly, there will be a natural impetus for students to critique and reconceptualize their own writing.

Certainly within a strictly academic rationalist classroom (Eisner and Vallance, 1974), aesthetics would create discord. That is why we must adopt post-modern sensibilities in our practice. The students are calling for it. We should take Karl's comment that "we can't really prove anything" as an indication that the current generation is experiencing a very different world from the generation before them and subsequently is looking for something else in terms of their education. Their world is one of split second images, sound bites, metaphor, diversion and chaos. When they listen to their teachers attempt to control their world and ideas with the language of modernism, they roll their eyes and play the game, knowing that there is something different out there. That game can consist of writing for the grade or writing just because the student does not know what else to do. These writing games run counter to the purpose of writing as a means of expressing a genuine thought, constructing knowledge, and creating change.

Ultimately life is not a series of regimented steps and preconceived, explainable experiences. Life is built out of detours and dead ends, tangents and trial and error, unknowns and unexpecteds. Dewey calls this "the precariousness of existence" (Bernstein, 1991, p. 329). We are arguing that the teaching of writing must work to blend that reality of life with the act of writing.

"It seems like form is much more important than what you're actually writing": Consequences

Our conversations with these students revealed that there are significant consequences if this blending does not happen. For example, as the above discussion indicates, many students are under the impression that analytical writing is more respected and valued within the academic community than creative or personal writing. Their comments about creative writing being "less sophisticated," and "not as thought provoking" illustrate how their current experiences in writing classrooms have constructed an artificial writing hierarchy. Outside of the academic

environment, such a dichotomy or false value system does not exist. Professional writers understand that different genres of writing have different effects depending upon the rhetorical situation. One is not inherently "better" than another, but each serves a very useful, powerful function under the appropriate circumstances.

Failure to understand and value alternative writing styles may ultimately cripple students' ability to use writing to communicate with a wide variety of audiences. By being taught that a certain style of analytical writing is somehow superior, students are only learning to be comfortable with one form of writing. Explorations into different types of writing for different purposes are designated as less mainstream, or out-of-classroom activities, thereby sending the message that they are not as meaningful. Consequently, students are not practicing a variety of writing styles and voices which may limit their ability to use writing in situations dissimilar to the traditional academic writing assignment. Even more significantly, this lack of practice may prevent them from hearing and recognizing their own true writing voice.

Another repercussion of the modernist writing classroom is that students believe structure is valued more than content. Karl's comment that "it seems like form is much more important than what you're actually writing" illustrates this sentiment. As we explained earlier, Karl is making an overly simplistic deduction, but one that is significant because of its simplicity. The students we spoke with believe very strongly that what they had to say is not as important, or not as respected as how they manage to organize those thoughts. This belief, whether founded or unfounded, is dangerous because it reduces writing to only structure, and fails to account for the intricate process of creating what goes into that structure. We are reminded here of the pervasive product vs. process dichotomy in many writing classes. Such a false dichotomy ignores writing's multiple dimensions and encourages students to mistakenly focus on only one aspect of the craft.

If these students were athletes, they would learn how to train their bodies. They would eat the right foods, get the right amount of sleep, and follow the appropriate exercise regime in order to prepare themselves for competition. But, in addition, they would also learn how to train their minds. Their coaches would encourage them to *think* like athletes, to understand the

nuances and intricacies of their game in order to outwit and outmaneuver their opponent. Only through the combination of a well-trained mind and a well-trained body does an athlete have the potential to win consistently. Unfortunately, unlike an athlete, young writers are only taught how to train their bodies. They are only shown how to organize their thoughts, how to present their ideas, how to cite their sources, etc. Although these are valuable lessons, in order for there to be long-term progress teachers must also train students to use their minds like thinkers and writers. They must not only practice the behavior of writers, but they must also enter the philosophical and epistemological dialogue of the writing tradition.

A narrow, lopsided conceptualization of writing strips writing of its true power - its ability to persuade, to evoke emotion, to institute change, to express feelings, and to communicate. Writing is reduced to an academic exercise, another hoop students are required to jump through in order to succeed in their scholastic career. This belief is evident in many of the students' comments and perspectives. Marcus shared his concern that he will be expected to write at a certain level in college next year, but that he has not received the experience or training necessary to meet those standards. As he explained, "...you have to know this stuff. People are talking about going to college, but they don't know how to write a basic research paper, and they are going to be unlevel when they go to college." Karl also talked about the apparent need to be prepared for what comes next, although unlike Marcus, he feels his teachers are overly concerned with this need: "We were sitting in class and it seems like everyone in the class and the teacher were in fear of next year. They need to know the five paragraph essay because they live in fear of Mr. K. next year who's going to tear them apart." Karl feels this emphasis on learning to write for next year's teacher is "way too short term." He recognizes one of the serious consequences of traditional writing pedagogy. By limiting the goal of writing to merely pleasing someone else's standards, ideally in the hopes of continuing to receive good grades, students fail to experience the potentially long term influence their writing may have. They fail to understand the true elasticity of their writing, and therefore work only so far as to meet short term expectations.

Conclusion

Comments like the ones above are what often fuel attempts at school reform. Ironically, these concerns often come from administrators, teachers, and parents rather than students. We are aware of the failure of most reform in schools. We also understand why most reform fails. More often than not, change is imposed on an institution or a school is expected to be flexible enough to deal with a 180 degree turn in philosophy or a paradigm shift (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Teaching is an intensely personal activity, and we cling to what we know because its success is evident within the classroom. Our paper comes from this experience and way of teaching.

Teaching writing from an aesthetic orientation is not a paradigm shift. It is an integration of our teaching and our lives. Aesthetics, the appreciation and understanding of art, makes up a part of who we are. Cherryholmes (1994) writes, "We do not simply live a mundane, brutish, unaesthetic life 'here' while beauty and pleasure and satisfaction are out 'there' in the world" (p. 13). Instead, beauty and pleasure are woven within the fabric of ourselves. Often what is closest to us is the most difficult to comprehend, but every time we watch a movie, read a trashy novel, listen to music or express love for someone, we use aesthetics to fully understand and appreciate the experience. Introducing that way of being into the writing classroom invites the teacher and the students to create a common language with which to rigorously interpret, critique and ultimately practice the art of writing.

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